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ABSTRACT

Discussing teacher training for teachers of American Indians as it exists today, this paper establishes the inadequacy of present training programs (with the exception of the program at Arizona State University, which offers courses specifically designed to train teachers of Indian students). Needs and methodological considerations for training teachers for Indians are examined. Also included are recommendations for research in training teachers for Indians and reflections by teacher trainees enrolled in the Indian Education course at Arizona State University (spring 1970) on what is a good teacher for Indian children. (MJB)

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DESIRABLE (INNOVATIVE) TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR THE TEACHERS OF INDIANS

A Position Paper
Submitted to
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory

By
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Introduction

Teacher training is one of the integral parts of the American educational system. Public education has always been involved in training school personnel whether they are teachers, counselors, administrators, etc. As in any other large programs, there are many gaps or unexplored areas in our teacher training programs. One of the specific areas to which this paper will address itself is that of training teachers for the Indian students.

Limitations

It should be recognized, however, that teacher training must necessarily have for its foundation clear and meaningful objectives and philosophical foundations. Although the development of teacher training must reflect ideas about other areas of education such as school philosophy, school board policies, and community leadership, this paper will attempt to restrict itself to teacher training for teachers of Indians as it exists today.

Nature and Scope

Currently, it is generally accepted that teacher training programs do not prepare the teachers adequately to perform efficiently in the Indian classroom. There are many other factors that hinder the effectiveness of the teacher and contribute to the frustrations of teachers involved in teaching Indian students. Some of these are:

1. Lack of relevant school policy
2. Lack of relevant curriculum
3. Lack of relevant audiovisual aids material

4. Attitude toward American Indians by other school personnel and the general public.

Those that directly involve the teacher as well as other professionals in the school setting (counselors, administrators, teacher aides, etc.) are:

1. The inability of the teacher to be objective in modifying stereotyped attitudes, values and feelings toward the American Indian when these feelings are present.

2. Insecure feelings that are caused by the teacher's lack of knowledge of the background and the contemporary culture of the Indian student with whom the teacher is involved.

3. Lack of knowledge in the use of available curriculum resources that may be available to her in the local community.

4. Conflicts caused by the teacher applying her general knowledge on Indian cultures to Indian students who possess specific knowledge of their own tribal culture.

Perhaps it is appropriate at this time to reflect some of the thoughts and observations of the prospective teacher.

Attachment #1 reflects some of the thoughts of teacher trainees who are enrolled in the Indian Education course at Arizona State University, Spring Semester, 1970. (See Attachment #1)

It is not uncommon to hear and observe the following comments and remarks in the university classrooms where this author has had many opportunities to speak to graduate and undergraduate classes:

"Do Indians speak different languages?"

". . . since Indian students come from a poor home . . ."

"Do all Indians have chiefs?"

"I hear that Indians don't get dizzy, that's the reason they can put up tall steel towers in New York."

"They are the first Americans, we took their land away from them."

"Are we welcome on the reservation?"

It will not be hard to elaborate on many misconceptions about the Indian

that have become prevalent in America. To an Indian, nothing can be more frustrating than to listen to these remarks--to say the least.

Research in Teacher Training for Indian Students

In the interest of space, only general remarks will be devoted to the status of research in teacher training for teachers of Indians.

Much effort has recently been devoted to conduct workshops and other special training for teachers of Indian students. They were generated primarily by the availability of Federal funds and were organized either by various schools or other special interest groups. There has been no evidence of any concrete Indian teacher training program that has been developed from the effort that has been exerted in these workshops.

Arizona State University is the only Higher Education institution that has developed, as part of its academic program, courses specifically designed to train teachers of Indian students. Although the Center for Indian Education at ASU has been in operation for almost a decade, it can only be described as being in its infancy in relation to the needs that are evident in this area.

Specific Needs for Training Teachers for the Indian

In order to identify specific areas of need that will outline the characteristics of the training programs for teachers of Indian students, it is necessary to divide the teachers (other school personnel) into two broad categories: (1) non-Indian teachers and (2) teachers who are members of Indian tribes.

1. The minimum basic characteristics of training program for teachers who are Indian:

   A. Required but modified teacher training courses at the higher education institution.

   B. Comprehensive overview of the relationship between Indian tribes and government agencies.

C. Teaching techniques and methods developed to implement curricular resource available from his or her own tribal culture.

D. Comprehensive overview of Indian personality characteristics, psychological and emotional.

E. Comprehensive overview of economic and social development in Indian communities.

F. Student teachings or internship at Indian schools, on or off the reservation.

2. The minimum basic characteristics of non-Indian teacher training program.

A. Required but modified teacher training course at the Higher Education institution.

B. Comprehensive instruction in identification of the differences that exist between cultures and specifically between the Indian culture and the Anglo society culture.

C. Comprehensive information on Indian personality characteristics (social, psychological, and emotional forces).

D. Detailed information on historic and contemporary relationship between Indian tribes and various government agencies (local, state, and federal).

E. Contemporary economic and social development in Indian communities.

F. Comprehensive information on pre-Columbian and contemporary Indian cultures.

G. Comprehensive analysis of social conflicts between Indians and members of dominant society.

H. Analysis of social conflicts and difficulties encountered between Indian students and non-Indian teachers.

I. Student teaching or internship at an Indian school, on or off the reservation.

Methodological Consideration to Meet the Needs for Training Teachers of Indian Students

The foundations upon which the methodological approaches for training of teachers of Indian children should be based are as follows:

1. Those teachers who wish to specialize for teaching a specific tribe or cultural group--Pueblo, nomadic, plains, etc.

2. Those teachers who desire to obtain general knowledge about all Indian cultures and tribes to assist them to perform effectively in public schools, off reservation boarding schools, etc.

Methodological Approaches

Only general remarks will be made at this time to describe methods and approaches that can be taken to reach the general objectives outlines above. Methods and approaches for training teachers of Indian students must necessarily involve development of curriculum and implementation of the curriculum. It is felt that the teacher training institutions in our universities and colleges are very capable of curriculum development once they are furnished proper guidelines and objectives. The only critical requirement for determining philosophical guidelines for curriculum development is that it must be based on the desires of the tribal organizations or local school boards or Urban Indian organizations in the case of urban public schools. However, the implementation of the curriculum for training teachers of Indian children will need experimentation and research.

Recommendations for Research in Training Teachers for Indian Children

The following recommendations will include projects which will cover broad areas of teacher training for Indian students as well as those which will be specific in nature and limited in scope. It is not the intent of this author to list these items in the order or priority.

1. State and other government school authorities must develop a system or a vehicle which will enable the state universities to meet the need for training teachers of Indian children, i.e., centers for Indian Education.

2. Joint and cooperative efforts must be instituted between tribal groups, urban Indian organizations in the case of public schools, and teacher training organizations and institutions to adapt guidelines and objectives for training of teachers for Indian children.

3. Once the philosophical guidelines and general objectives for teacher training have been developed, projects should then be developed to test the feasibility of training programs for training teachers of Indian students.

Project 1 Initiate a project to assist tribes to train school personnel for their schools (BIA, public mission). Tribal Education coordinators should be the contact office.

Project 2 Train tribal school boards to develop tribal education philosophies from which basic objectives and guidelines for tribal teacher training programs can be developed.

Project 3 Initiate project to assist tribes to search for and recruit teachers who are tribal members to assist in developing training programs for teachers and school personnel for the tribe.

Project 4 Assist tribes to locate and assign qualified tribal members to provide technical assistance to teacher training institutions.

Project 5 Develop a project for Indian teacher (administrator, counselor, etc.) Upward Bound with features that will carry the most capable people to achieve as high a degree as a doctorate.

Conclusion

The author would like to emphasize that American Indian cultures and languages are an integral part of world knowledge which forms the foundations for Indian communities, therefore, the right of the Indian community to exist and participate and maintain its role in America must be the ultimate objective of all programs designed to initiate change in the Indian community of our nation.

"What is a Good Teacher for Indian Children?"

I really think that some kind of training should be given in the area of Indian values and ethics so that the teachers would be aware of some of the things that would motivate the Indian children.

. . . . . .

One prime requisite in the training of prospective teachers for Indian students would be to acquaint them with some general characteristics which are drawn from the students' cultural background. This then would also entail an overview of the culture.

What immediately comes to my mind in this respect is the initial apparent quietness or shyness on the part of the youngster. This seems to be a temporary reaction on their part but to an "unaware" person some permanent damage could be effected if the attitude were taken in the wrong vein by the instructor.

. . . . . .

First, these teachers must sincerely want to teach Indian children. They must not have a condescending attitude but a concerned one. Their job will be a challenge and rewarding.

These teachers should be specially trained for the reservation or wherever the Indian children are.

. . . . . .

There is little doubt that reform is needed in the area of getting a better education for Indian children. I feel that in order to achieve a higher quality of education for Indians, it is necessary to better qualify the teacher for her job. In light of that I have a few recommendations toward better educating our Indian children.

I think proper training in Indian background and culture falls far short of what it should be. In other words, increase the curriculum of Indian Education courses and require prospective teachers to take a certain number.

Second, before a teacher goes on the reservation, he should be required to take a course, or do research in the cultural background of that particular tribe. Going a step further, it certainly would not hurt to possess a knowledge of the native language.

Also, a cultural void would be filled if Indian adults were encouraged to enter the program. It seems by having qualified Indian adults teaching Indian children, a communication gap, as well as inferiority complexes, could be avoided.

To ask for new and better equipment is almost impossible. The government seems unwilling to provide an adequate environment for learning. Therefore, the emphasis must be placed on teacher quality as an effective means of better educating the Indian child.

A project that has worked well here in the city involves a student teaching program that covers two years of college. Becoming familiar with Indian problems, before a teacher is set on his own, can be very helpful toward understanding problems and methods that will appear later.

The "ideal" situation would be for the teacher to be of the same tribe as her students.

Future Indian teachers would have a fairly good cultural background of the Indians they wish to teach.

Training right on the reservation would be more beneficial and meaningful than in the University situation.

. . . . . .

This course being my first contact with Indian Education, the background of experience from which I have to draw is very limited. However, from the reading I have done this semester, one area of deficiency in teacher training stands out in my mind. This is in the area of teaching the English language.

There cannot be too much emphasis placed in the importance of the fact that teaching Indian children to speak English is not enough. English instruction should take place in every subject, in every grade, every day. The teaching should be a constant and consistent process. Unless a child has a large vocabulary, he will be unable to read the material presented to him in the intermediate and upper grades. Merely learning to pronounce words is not enough. A teacher cannot expect a child to show interest in reading material that he does not understand, and as children grow older, their ability to achieve depends more and more upon their ability to read and understand.

Through a little extra effort on the part of teachers, Indian children can be given the tools through which they can experience greater success. In my research, the simplest, most effective method I have found is the preparation of glossaries by the teacher to accompany the reading material of the child. He has a ready reference of words explained in terms that are meaningful to him, and provide for him a key to understanding written English.

. . . . . .

There are many different characteristics and qualities that are part of a "good teacher". However, I believe, it means a little more than simply being a good instructor.

In the past, Indian children have been cheated of a progressive education because our teachers have been unfamiliar with their backgrounds and cultures. Teachers tend to place all Indian children in one category--with no understanding of tribes or the various rituals. Also, these children have been repeatedly labeled "slow learners", "low IQ's", and "lazy". This is a terrible and dreadful misconception.

The basic problem is that teachers, instead of passing these children over, should delve into their cultures and enrich their instruction with this familiar motivation. We do this with the typical "middle-class" child.

Why is the Indian culture not used in the same manner? No wonder our Indians are lost in school. All children bring past experiences into the classroom; our reading, spelling, math and creative writing programs are passed on. These children need something familiar to them in their curriculum to relate to in the classroom--if they do not have it, then they will naturally be lost.

To me, the most exciting atmosphere for learning is when each culture is recognized and learned (explored) for the benefit of all. Wouldn't a dull classroom be when every student comes from the same background? If diversified, each child can learn from the other. With a "good teacher's" help and proper motivation toward specific goals the Indian student would benefit as would every other student in the class. (and the teacher too)

In the final analysis, a good teacher for Indian children (actually for us all) is one that uses the interesting cultures of these children for the formation of a fascinating class and to motivate the entire class. A teacher that possesses this ability and an understanding of Indians would truly have the ingredients of a fine environment for learning.